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THE JESUS  
OF THE  
SAYINGS GOSPEL Q

*by James M. Robinson*

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# The Jesus of the Sayings Gospel Q

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## I. What Jesus was Trying to Do

Jesus was raised in Nazara,<sup>1</sup> a hamlet in the hill country of Lower Galilee. He heard about a holy man named John,<sup>2</sup> and went to him to undergo his rite of initiation, baptism (by immersion),<sup>3</sup> into a completely new life style, where the givens are basically changed: When the ideal becomes real<sup>4</sup> and God rules,<sup>5</sup> there are no poor<sup>6</sup> or

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<sup>1</sup> Q [4:16]. (Q is cited by Lucan chapter and verse numbers. Double square brackets around a verse number [ ] indicate doubt as to whether the reference is in Q). This is Q's unique spelling of Nazareth.

<sup>2</sup> Q 3:2; [3:21/Matt 3:13]. (Whether this verse belongs to Q has been often contested, since Luke almost completely deletes it in his program to periodize history; but it seems to be presupposed in the Temptation narrative.)

<sup>3</sup> Q [3:21/Matt 3:13].

hungry,<sup>7</sup> no handicapped or sick,<sup>8</sup> no exploiter<sup>9</sup> or enemy,<sup>10</sup> no mentally disturbed<sup>11</sup> or force of evil.<sup>12</sup> Jesus believed all this ideal was the basic reality, and acted accordingly.<sup>13</sup>

In the rite of passage administered by John, Jesus may have taken off all his identifying garb,<sup>14</sup> an intentional loss of identity, and then resumed, perhaps only out of modesty, the basic shirt and cloak of his day.<sup>15</sup> But he did not resume wearing sandals,<sup>16</sup> perhaps as a symbol of penance.<sup>17</sup> He carried no coin purse,<sup>18</sup> for he had no

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<sup>4</sup> Such imprecise, not to say fuzzy, use of technical terms is not inappropriate. The term that Q elevates to its central abstraction, kingdom/reign of God, similarly says, generally, everything, but, precisely, nothing.

<sup>5</sup> The kingdom/reign of God, actually a quite rare, non-technical term, dominates the abstract conceptualizing of Q: 6:20; 7:28; 10:9,11; 11:2,20; 12:31; 13:18,20,29; [14:16/Matt 22:2]; 16:16. The common assumption that it is, in terms of the history of religions, derived from Jewish apocalypticism, is inaccurate, since it does not occur there. The historical problem the term poses is rather that of its sudden appearance here, without an immediate background. The situation is similar with regard to the other most prominent idiom, son of man, which also presents the history-of-religions problem of lacking an immediate background. See J. M. Robinson, "The Son of Man in the Sayings Gospel Q," in *Tradition and Translation: Festschrift for Carsten Colpe* (Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Q 6:20; 12:28; 12:29/Matt 6:31.

<sup>7</sup> Q 6:21; 10:7; 11:3,11-12; 12:24,29; 13:28-29.

<sup>8</sup> Q 10:9.

<sup>9</sup> Q 6:29-30.

<sup>10</sup> Q 6:27,35.

<sup>11</sup> Q 11:14.

<sup>12</sup> Q 4:13; 11:14,20,21-22.

<sup>13</sup> Q 6:43-49.

<sup>14</sup> The metaphor of the believer spiritually disrobing and rerobing familiar in the Pauline and Gnostic traditions is absent from Q, which hence provides no metaphors from which to draw inferences about John's baptismal rite.

<sup>15</sup> Q 6:29.

<sup>16</sup> Q 10:4.

<sup>17</sup> The injunction not to wear sandals fits poorly with Q 3:16 and Mark 1:7, when understood as John being unworthy to perform a servant's task of taking on and off a master's sandals, which, when applied to Jesus, would indicate he continued to wear sandals. But it could have referred to removing his sandals permanently prior to immersion, with John's unworthiness to do this being a stage in the subordination

coins and earned no money. He wore no backpack,<sup>19</sup> for he had no change of clothes or provisions of food. He carried no club,<sup>20</sup> the weapon of the poor, for he turned the other cheek<sup>21</sup> and gave muggers the shirt off his back,<sup>22</sup> defenseless. He counted on life's necessities being provided without his working<sup>23</sup> or otherwise concerning himself for his own physical well-being.<sup>24</sup> All this, at

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of John to Jesus picked up and amplified by Matt 3:14-15. N. Krieger, "Barfuß Busse Tun," *NT* 1 (1956): 227-228, followed by W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, transl. by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, 2nd ed. revised and augmented by F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker from W. Bauer's 5th ed., 1958 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. βασιτάζω, i.e. "remove," citing also K. Preisendanz et al. eds., *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, Sammlung wissenschaftlicher Commentare, Vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Tübingen, 1928), 1058: "βασιτάξας τὸ στεφάνιον ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς."

<sup>18</sup> Q [10:4].

<sup>19</sup> Q [10:4].

<sup>20</sup> Q [10:4/Matt 10:10]. Luke 22:36 confirms indirectly that a weapon had been forbidden, though what is here restored is a more middle-class weapon than is a club. The requirement of a sword is here necessitated by the following Marcan story of the cutting off of an ear in Gethsemane. The RSV translation "stave" obscures somewhat the defensive meaning that a student from Kenya first brought to my attention as thoroughly obvious. At el-Kasr near Nag Hammadi I have seen this formidable weapon in the hand of a peasant in a situation in which he felt called upon to be able to defend himself. The *Los Angeles Times* of 17 xii 92, reporting on the new sense of security provided by the arrival of US military forces in the famine-ridden town of Baidoa in Somalia, provides the anecdote: "Wednesday, the feeding center was filled with optimism and a new sense of security, commodities as rare as grain in this parched land. 'Where's your gun?' Rice teased Abduhakim, 19, one of the center's security guards. Only a day before, he had been carrying an automatic weapon. Wednesday, he was carrying a walking stick." The stick was obviously not due to sudden lameness, but rather was a weapon permissible in the presence of US forces in a way that a gun would not be. The *Los Angeles Times* of 11 iii 93 published a picture with the caption: "Two Somali men walk through the ruins of what was once the Hotel Aruba in the capital, Mogadishu. They carry sticks for protection."

<sup>21</sup> Q 6:29a.

<sup>22</sup> Q 6:29b.

<sup>23</sup> Q 12:24,27. The ethos is more that of a mendicant order than that of the Calvinistic work ethic.

<sup>24</sup> Q 12:29-31.

least if we may assume he practised what he preached. (Central to his preaching was the insistence that one practise what one preaches.<sup>25</sup>)

This involved Jesus moving away from home and family ties.<sup>26</sup> He set up a base camp at the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>27</sup> There, well below sea level, the climate may have been more tolerant of such an exposed existence as that which Jesus advocated and practised. Here, along the shore and in the alluvial plain, where the Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee, and in the rugged hill country behind, he worked both sides of the river.<sup>28</sup> He developed a circuit of three villages, Capharnaum,<sup>29</sup> Bethsaida and Chorazin, all in close boating or walking distance of each other, where he cured sick people,<sup>30</sup> laid out his thoughts,<sup>31</sup> and motivated a few to abandon their customary life style and join up with him.<sup>32</sup> At some juncture this base camp was repudiated,

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<sup>25</sup> Q 6:46.

<sup>26</sup> Q 11:27-28. The move of the family with him to Capharnaum (John 2:12) may not be early tradition, but rather a redactional transition from the Wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11), where his mother had been present, to the Healing of the Official's Son (John 4:46b-54), which in the Semeia Source followed the Wedding immediately.

<sup>27</sup> Q 7:1; 10:13-15.

<sup>28</sup> Capharnaum (Q 7:1; 10:15) and Chorazin (Q 10:13) are just west of the river, Bethsaida (Q 10:13) just east. See R. Arav and J. J. Rousseau, "Elusive Bethsaida Recovered," *The Fourth R* (January 1991): 1-4; H-W. Kuhn and R. Arav, "The Bethsaida Excavations: Historical and Archaeological Approaches," in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. B. A. Pearson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 77-106.

<sup>29</sup> J. L. Reed, *The Population of Capernaum*, Occasional Papers of The Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, ed. J. Ma. Asgeirsson, no. 24 (Claremont: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1992): 15,19, concludes, after sifting through the various kinds of meagre evidence, that population estimates beyond 1700 inhabitants are unfounded. The other two locations seem to have been even smaller.

<sup>30</sup> Q 7:1-10; 10:9.

<sup>31</sup> Q 10:9. Q 6:20-49 is a secondary collection.

<sup>32</sup> Q 9:59-60; 22:28.

presumably because it had turned on his movement and had to be abandoned.<sup>33</sup>

His procedure seems to have been as follows: He would walk along the shore, catch an occasional ride in a fishing boat, hike through the hilly terrain from house to house,<sup>34</sup> from hamlet to hamlet,<sup>35</sup> knocking on doors.<sup>36</sup> When someone opened the door, he would say *Shalom*,<sup>37</sup> and, if received hospitably, would show the reality of the ideal he kept talking about<sup>38</sup> by the way he cared for the sick.<sup>39</sup> The "Peace!" of the normally hollow greeting (equal to no more than our "Good morning!") would thus become concrete reality,<sup>40</sup> which the host, who had at least already responded positively to the initial advance at the door,<sup>41</sup> might well come to take literally.

Jesus ate as moderately or sumptuously as was provided.<sup>42</sup> But on leaving the next day or so, he would accept no provisions for the

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<sup>33</sup> Q 10:13,15. Q 9:58 would, to the extent it is accurate, reflect better the subsequent homelessness.

<sup>34</sup> Q 10:7.

<sup>35</sup> Q 10:8,10-11.

<sup>36</sup> Q 10:5; 11:9-10. Being locked out became a painful metaphor, Q 13:24-29.

<sup>37</sup> Q [10:5].

<sup>38</sup> Q 10:9b.

<sup>39</sup> Q 10:9a.

<sup>40</sup> Q 10:6.

<sup>41</sup> Q 10:6.

<sup>42</sup> Q 7:34; 10:8; 13:26. This stands in contrast to the asceticism of John (Q 7:33; Mark 1:6). But the caricature by "this generation" that Jesus is "a glutton and a drunkard" is presented as an invidious distortion of him coming "eating and drinking" (comparable to John having a demon as the caricature corresponding to him coming neither eating nor drinking). L. E. Vaage, "Q<sup>1</sup> and the Historical Jesus: Some Peculiar Sayings (7:33-34; 9:57-58,59-60; 14:26-27)," *Forum* 5/2 (June 1989): 159-176, infers Jesus is a "real party animal" (p. 165), "a bit of a hellion and wanderer on the wild (or, at least, illicit) side of things" (p. 166), "a bit of an imp, in Socrates' terms a social gad-fly" (p. 175), a characterization designed (p. 175) to increase the "notoriety" of the Jesus Seminar (which, to judge by newspaper reports, turned out to be a success). As such, one can join in his "enjoyment" (p. 175). But his more serious effort (p. 165) is inadequate: "Far from worrying about where his next meal would come from (as 12:22 admonishes not to do), Jesus, according to 7:34,



road.<sup>43</sup> This not because he was ascetic - he had, after all, eaten what was put before him - but perhaps because carrying one's own provisions through the day would involve selfishly depriving those in need whom he passed on the way. For he was constantly on the go,<sup>44</sup> starting over each time to implement the ideal, leaving it to God to care for the practical side of things.<sup>45</sup> When a door was slammed in his face, he went to the next house, and when he was run out of town, his parting gesture was to the effect that they, not he, had lost out.<sup>46</sup>

If what he had to say ever got a wider hearing,<sup>47</sup> it and the corroborating conduct would amount to a direct threat to the system that had put the ruling class on top. Though his activity was not explicitly political, he did realize that the problem was systemic.<sup>48</sup>

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apparently ate and drank well and often enough to be suspected of overindulgence. Perhaps for that reason, he saw no reason for concern about these things. In any case, his behavior in this regard seems not to have conformed to the conventional image of religious seriousness and uprightness." Somewhere between being conventional and being a hellion is where Jesus is, in terms of the Q texts, to be placed. The serious task is to seek to interpret the texts in a way that does justice to them in their context of early Q material, and thus to "place" Jesus' posture toward the necessities of life, a task which Vaage in this essay does not actually undertake.

<sup>43</sup> Q [10:4].

<sup>44</sup> Q 9:58.

<sup>45</sup> Q 11:3,9-13; 12:29-31. The concept of being provided by one's superiors with a day's rations of perishable bread was common in the ancient world. The relevant texts are collected by E. M. Yamauchi, "The 'Daily Bread' Motif in Antiquity," *WTJ* 28 (1966): 145-156.

<sup>46</sup> Q 10:10-11.

<sup>47</sup> Q 11:33; 12:3/Matt 10:27.

<sup>48</sup> The systemic nature of the problem is reflected in the term kingdom of God. This is not just because a contrast is being drawn to a diabolical kingdom (Q 4:5-7; 11:15,17-18,21-22). It is rather that the surfacing of the good, be it of varying sorts, such as food, clothing, healing, exorcism, deliverance from trial, is brought together in the ascription of it all to God. One such instance is thus symptomatic of the others. The activation of the good exposes the basic impotence of evil. The apparent prevalence of evil thus is unmasked as an unreal sham, and thus as a system is broken. For this will surely come to light all over. Thus it is the systemic



For he advocated an alternative life style that presupposed a different, utopian kind of world. By calling it the kingdom/reign of God, he by implication defrocked the temple cult and the state religion. He was thus in effect a revolutionary, and shared the fate of John and others before them who had spoken up for that ideal as real. Cut short almost before he had begun, Jesus may hardly have had time or occasion to cope with the impracticalities that were inherent in implementing such a utopian ideal, or to revise in the light of experience. The problem of reaching a *modus vivendi* with the given establishment was left to his successors.

The Jordan River was not only a geographical barrier, at places often not navigable (especially north of the Sea of Galilee); it was also a political frontier. Since a centurion stationed at the border town Capharnaum had a high regard for Jesus as a faith healer,<sup>49</sup> such a powerful Gentile may well have functioned on the local level as a patron, producing in effect for Jesus a haven from political oppression. Jesus also got along well with the customs officials.<sup>50</sup> It may have been the termination of this privileged position, perhaps as a repercussion of the elimination of John,<sup>51</sup> that led to the abandoning of this base camp and its resultant condemnation.<sup>52</sup> But this is mere speculation.

No other location attained a status comparable to that of Capharnaum and its immediate environs, from which one may infer that no alternative base camp could be set up. Scenes are usually not identified by place name, and those that are (all outside of Q) are isolated occurrences: Nain in Luke; Cana in the Semeia

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nature of the kingdom of God that leads to eschatology, which is more an inference from than a presupposition of what is taking place.

<sup>49</sup> Q 7:1-10.

<sup>50</sup> Q 7:[29],34. The frontier position suggests that what one usually translates "tax collectors" may have been "customs agents." See G. Theissen, *The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form* (London: SCM, 1987), ch. 12, "Men on the Frontier," 109-117, featuring a Capharnaum "toll collector" and his converted predecessor.

<sup>51</sup> This may be implied in the prominence of Herod especially in Luke 9:7-9; 13:31-32; 23:6-16 (all missing from Q).

<sup>52</sup> Q 10:13-15.

Source and hence in John; Sychar and Ephraim in John; Nazareth and Jericho in Mark. Jerusalem and its surroundings (Bethany) form a case for themselves; in any case they are absent from Q, with the exception of Jerusalem's rejection of Wisdom's envoys from the dawn of time to the end of the canon, and hence its resultant abandonment by God to its fate at the time of the Jewish War 66-70 CE.<sup>53</sup>

Jesus lived in a religious culture and hence, though not learned in his religious tradition (in contrast to the Qumran scribes and the Evangelists), naturally experienced and expressed his idealistic humane orientation in religious terms. The ideal that again and again became real he called God ruling, and his abandon regarding practical matters of self-interest came to expression as prayer, turning those matters over to God to handle. But his movement actually became organized as a functional religion only after his death, when it seemed to imitate the more highly organized religious movement of John; but this is not yet evident in Q.<sup>54</sup> During his lifetime Jesus functioned within (even when against) the given religious culture with which he was familiar, Galilean Judaism.

The horror, consternation, confusion and dislocation attendant upon the brutal elimination of Jesus probably surpassed that which may have taken place among Jesus and his followers resultant upon the death of John (about whose own followers we know in this regard even less than the scanty information about Jesus' followers). Perhaps John's death was less of a crisis due to the fact

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<sup>53</sup> Q 11:49-51; 13:34-35.

<sup>54</sup> Though the baptism of Jesus was probably in Q, there is no reference to him or his disciples baptizing. John 4:1 makes a passing reference to Jesus baptizing, which is promptly corrected in John 4:2, to the effect that not Jesus, but only his disciples, baptized. *The Testimony of Truth* (NHC IX,3: 69,15-17) reports: "For [the Son] of [man] did not baptize any of his disciples." Luke 11:1 uses John teaching his disciples to pray as a context for the Lord's Prayer (Q 11:2-4). Mark 2:18 uses John's (and the Pharisees'!) disciples' fasting as the occasion for calling on Jesus' disciples to fast. Secondary though such settings for sayings no doubt are, they together do convey the impression that John's religion was in such formal matters ahead of the Jesus movement.

that Jesus had already distanced himself geographically from John and had his own practise and message. Jesus was in any case able to carry on after John's death, whereas Peter apparently was not prepared in a comparable way. For he floundered and retreated with the others back to Galilee, only then to return to Jerusalem, no doubt a bit sheepishly, to set up headquarters there. Of all this Q says nothing.

Q apparently does not reflect the Jesus movement's headquarters in Jerusalem, but rather its remnants in Galilee. This is suggested not only by the distinctive gospel of Q and the absence of Holy Week and its gospel, both of which set Q apart from the standard forms of primitive Christianity, but also by the absence from Q of any of the names of Jesus' family or followers, and even of any titles for them. The possible exception is "Worker," which however is used by Paul *in malam partem*, perhaps with reference to much the same kind of itinerants.<sup>55</sup> Yet Q does not speak of "the Twelve."<sup>56</sup> Nor does Q speak of "the Apostles."<sup>57</sup> Thus the Jerusalem leaders from Galilee and their titles are eloquently absent. Similarly the (non-) Christology of Q seems archaic.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Q 10:2; 10:7 (par 1 Tim 5:18; *Did* 13:2); Q 13:27; 2 Cor 11:13; Phil 3:2; 2 Tim 2:15. See D. Georgi, *Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief: Studien zur religiösen Propaganda in der Spätantike* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964); English translation, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 40, 68, 165-167, 224-226.

<sup>56</sup> Q 22:30 is moving toward this title, in referring to Jesus' followers sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. It is the parallel Matt 19:28 that adds that there were "twelve" thrones, moving a step closer to "the Twelve."

<sup>57</sup> Q 10:2; 11:49 use the verb "to send," Q 10:16 the active participle "sending," and Q 13:34 the passive participle "those sent." "Apostles" in Q 11:49 is apparently a reference to pre-Christian "emissaries," like the "prophets" of the Old Testament, ("from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah," Q 11:51). If Luke had inserted the term to refer to Christian apostles (Matt 23:34 refers to "wise men and scribes"), he would probably have followed his custom of including the definite article. Thus Q usage is moving toward, but not quite attaining to, the Christian concept "apostle." The rough synonym "to cast out" in Q 10:2, meaning to send out, is moving in the same direction.

<sup>58</sup> See Robinson, "The Son of Man in the Sayings Gospel Q."

This may be in part due simply to the temporal primitiveness of Q, but may well be more due to geographical isolation from the mainstream of emerging Christianity.<sup>59</sup> One may assume that the central core of followers, who had actually broken with their former life styles and accompanied Jesus on his way, tended not to be those who continued to live in Galilee, but rather those who made Jerusalem and beyond their orientation. Those left in Galilee lacked leadership and ultimately failed. Most of the remnants who did not get absorbed into emerging normative Judaism were ultimately absorbed along with their text into the thriving Gentile Christian church (perhaps as the Matthean church). A few may have stuck it out with their outdated life style, in Gentile Christian eyes almost like the Amish in American Christendom today. Such holdouts of the Q movement may have continued a shadowy existence under what became heretical designations, such as Ebionites and Nazarenes,<sup>60</sup> not to speak of "heretical" precursors such as the Judaizers: "those of circumcision"<sup>61</sup> who would "Judaize" the Gentiles if they could.<sup>62</sup> But for all practical purposes the Q movement survived only as a text used by the Gentile-Christian Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

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<sup>59</sup> P. Hoffmann, "QR und der Menschensohn: Eine vorläufige Skizze," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, Vol. 1, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium, eds. F. Van Segbroeck et al., no. 100 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 1992), 421-456, esp. "V. Der Menschensohn und der Fall Jerusalems," 450-456, has renewed persuasively the argument that Q 11:49-51; 13:34-35 reflect the crisis mood of the siege of Jerusalem, as do comparable passages in a roughly contemporary Mark. This would tend to date the redactional layer of Q, but not the preceding layer(s).

<sup>60</sup> See J. M. Robinson, "The Sayings Gospel Q," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, Vol. 1, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium, eds. F. Van Segbroeck et al., no. 100 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 1992), 361-388, especially, 366-368, 373-382.

<sup>61</sup> Gal 2:12.

<sup>62</sup> Gal 2:14.



## II. The Most Archaic Primitive Christianity

When one looks back from the Apostles' Creed (Rome's baptismal confession of the Second Century), Q is so remote as to be behind the vanishing point. Between "born of the virgin Mary" and "suffered under Pontius Pilate," the sayings of Jesus (as well as his baptism, temptation, inclusive mealtime practise, and healings/exorcisms) are no longer important enough to include. Q was in substance simply bypassed. If Jesus' followers were called "Christians" at a secondary stage first attested at Antioch after Paul's arrival there,<sup>63</sup> Q was too archaic to be identified by this nomenclature. For not only "Christian," but even "Christ" are terms missing from its vocabulary. Galilean Christianity, where Q was at home, is not only passed over in the narrative of Acts.<sup>64</sup> One would not even imagine, from the varieties of religious experience reflected in Acts, that there was ever a movement whose stock in trade was the sayings of Jesus. This absence of the use of sayings of Jesus in Acts is even more surprising than is the absence of sayings of Jesus in the Pauline letters. For Luke knew Q intimately, to judge by his use of it in his Gospel. But he does not otherwise betray the existence of a church that knew Q intimately.

Matthew and Luke had in similar ways, independently of each other but in step with their shared times, transcended Q by imbedding this Jewish Sayings Gospel into the Procrustean bed of the Gentile-Christian Gospel of Mark, then prefaced it with infancy narratives and christological genealogies and consummated it with resurrection appearances. And they were both constantly involved in the updating of details, as they were also in their use of Mark. But there are even explicit and basic ways in which Matthew and Luke, each in separate instances, relegate Q to a bygone age no longer binding on the present:

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<sup>63</sup> Acts 11:26.

<sup>64</sup> A single passing allusion to the well-being of a church in Galilee occurs in Acts 9:31.

Luke is able to leave the Workers' Instructions in Q relatively unaltered,<sup>65</sup> for he had formally inserted their abrogation<sup>66</sup> promptly after completing copying out Q.<sup>67</sup> Hence he is under no obligation to present the Acts of the Apostles as conforming to them.

Luke could also leave Q's Inaugural Sermon<sup>68</sup> relatively intact, since he implemented Mark's opening summary of Jesus' message, to the effect that the time is fulfilled,<sup>69</sup> by introducing<sup>70</sup> a completely new Inaugural Sermon in Nazara, beginning with the explicit quotation of a biblical prophecy<sup>71</sup> as now having been fulfilled in Jesus. This same text from Isaiah, though not explicitly cited, was the center of the pastiche of references to healings and proclamation referring back already in Q<sup>72</sup> to the Inaugural Sermon and the Healing of the Centurion's Boy. But this must have seemed to Luke all too implicit. The proof from scripture, to the effect that Jesus is the fulfillment, had grown considerably in importance by the time of the canonical evangelists, for whom Jesus is first of all the Messiah.

Matthew (or his community), also sensing the problem, had only partially strengthened this scriptural basis by using Isa 61 at the opening of the Inaugural Sermon of Q to expand the Beatitudes, though Matthew's Sermon had in other regards grown considerably, so as to keep up with the advancing times.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Q 10:2-16.

<sup>66</sup> Q 22:35-36.

<sup>67</sup> Q 22:30.

<sup>68</sup> Q 6:20-49.

<sup>69</sup> Mark 1:15.

<sup>70</sup> Luke 4:16-30.

<sup>71</sup> Isa 61:1-2.

<sup>72</sup> Q 7:22.

<sup>73</sup> H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990), 167-68, follows H. D. Betz, *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), in dating the Sermon on the Mount to a pre-Matthean stage, in Koester's case between Q and the Gospel of Matthew (Q<sup>Mt</sup>).

The cures that fulfill Isaiah's prophecies are all too peripheral in Q, with only passing belated references<sup>74</sup> in addition to the Healing of the Centurion's Boy in Capernaum.<sup>75</sup> As Mark indicates,<sup>76</sup> the importance of Jesus as thaumaturge continued to grow. But in the Q context the Healing of the Centurion's Boy is more concerned with the authority of Jesus' word than with the healing itself. Hence the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy needed to be quite consciously augmented by Luke<sup>77</sup> and especially by Matthew, who defers the pastiche from Isaiah used in Q until he can insert two chapters<sup>78</sup> to document explicitly each of the cures mentioned there. He does this largely with the help of Mark, but he succeeded in reaching this goal only by doubling both a Marcan and a Q healing, in effect making up two healings needed in this context from healings occurring later in the narrative.<sup>79</sup>

Luke in his second volume narrated Gentile Christianity as the successor to the Jewish ministry of Jesus portrayed in his Gospel, with the help of his periodizing historiography and his use of the Acts of the Apostles to connect/separate his own time to/from that of Jesus. Gentile Christianity is also accorded prominent billing at the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew, though Matthew had no Acts in which to go into detail. For Matthew ends with the Great Commission,<sup>80</sup> thus formally introducing, as the last word, a Gentile mission, with its rite of Baptism (not exercised in the Gospel of Matthew since John's baptism of Jesus) replacing (an unmentioned) Circumcision. In the period marked by (the

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<sup>74</sup> Q 10:7; 11:14.

<sup>75</sup> Q 7:1-10.

<sup>76</sup> Not to speak of the Semeia Source used by the Gospel of John, and Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians.

<sup>77</sup> Luke 7:19.

<sup>78</sup> Matt 8-9.

<sup>79</sup> Matt 9:27-31 revises the healing of Blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46-52 that Matthew then repeats in its correct position at Matt 20:29-34; and Matt 9:32-34 revises the exorcism of a dumb person in Q 11:14 that Matthew then repeats in its correct Q position at Matt 12:22.

<sup>80</sup> Matt 28:18-20.

composition of) the Gospel of Matthew, this in effect turned over the Jesus movement that has been continued by the Q people to the Gentile-Christian church. Thus by relegating the Q movement itself to a past epoch, Matthew is able to record for that earlier epoch the limitation of Jesus' ministry to Judaism, even going beyond the original Q text itself in explicitness.<sup>81</sup> After all, those outdated policies will be formally transcended and replaced by the Great Commission, which thus closes down or transcends the fading Q movement, as far as Matthew is concerned.

These various ways, often quite explicit, in which the canonical texts mutually support each other in relegating Q to a bygone age and system, indicate that one has to do, in the case of Q, with a pre-canonical text in more than just a source-critical sense. Q represents an archaic stage of the primitive church that was not yet what one formally understands as Christian.<sup>82</sup> The real problem with Q is that it has to do with a kind of Jesus movement set apart from the various familiar alternatives within New Testament Christianity. It challenged them all (and hence us) by being to a considerable extent already *dépassé*, its authority anachronistic, and yet still quite authoritative. For much of Q is of an age, or at least a primitiveness, matched only by Paul's authentic letters, yet on the inside track of Jesus in a way that Paul could not and did not<sup>83</sup> pretend to be.<sup>84</sup> This latent threat of Q to the Christian establishment that claims Jesus for itself is the covert strength of the still-encountered denial of the existence of Q. The tacit (il)logic of the syllogism runs: one cannot get to Jesus without Q; but one is not really willing to live with the Jesus of Q; so Q did not exist.

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<sup>81</sup> Matt 10:6,23.

<sup>82</sup> C. Tuckett, in his "Response to A. D. Jacobson and B. L. Mack," (Washington, D.C., Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, November 22, 1993), points out that anyone who has "a positive, non-neutral relation to the person of Jesus" may be called a Christian, in which sense of course the Q movement was Christian.

<sup>83</sup> 2 Cor 6:16.

<sup>84</sup> See J. M. Robinson, "The Q Trajectory: Between John and Matthew via Jesus," in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. B. A. Pearson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 173-194.



So long as we assumed we already knew the various subdivisions within primitive Christianity, with the help of Acts and other New Testament texts, the problem could be controlled: Q was reduced to an ethical application of the standard Christian gospel of cross and resurrection, which was so familiar that Q did not even need to mention it. But we should recognize that there is much more in primitive Christianity of which we are ignorant than there is of which we are informed. For one has detected that Q not only lacks allusions to the standard gospel oriented to the cross, such as one finds in Mark even prior to its passion narrative (from Mark 3:6 on), but adheres to a gospel of its own: the Gospel of the Poor about their Kingdom.

Thus we become open to learn what Q really has to offer: the stepping stones that modulate from the footsteps of Jesus to the New Testament consensus. For Q offers the layering that documents more than one step to get from the one to the other. Our customary leap from one to the other, even when we concede it is a leap, is hardly better than whistling in the dark. The old problem "from Jesus to Paul" was never resolved in an intelligible way. But when the connecting links gradually come to light in Q, they shed unexpected and, one should hope, welcomed light in both directions: both Jesus and the New Testament text stand out in sharper, more eloquent profile. We see what separates them, but also what steps connect them. We can work our way back to Jesus with much more clarity, and work our way forward from him to the New Testament with much more insight into what is and is not loyal to him.

### III. The Awkwardness of a Hermeneutic for Q

A hermeneutic of suspicion cannot correctly go as far as did Reimarus, in considering Jesus a phony, his movement a hoax. Jesus was impractical, though sincere, serious, committed. His movement failed, and hence does not actually provide a useful precedent. But he gave it his best.

"Why do you call me Lord, Lord, but do not do what I say"<sup>85</sup> poses fundamentally the hermeneutical problem of Q, which is more a matter of conduct than of ideology. Retaining quaint ideas would have been relatively easy.

The history of the exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount (which contains much of the oldest layer of Q) well documents the history of Q hermeneutics. (Since the very existence of Q was soon lost from sight, almost two millennia of Christianity did not realize what it was doing to Q itself.) Francis of Assisi, who rediscovered the Sermon on the Mount as the basis for his drastic renewal movement, forbade his followers to "gloss" his Rule, recognized that any interpretation facilitated dodging. Glossing all too readily means glossing over.

Jesus' own implementation of the ideal was revised and adapted to be more practical, which often meant that it was watered down. But under different circumstances the ideal, to be revived and actualized, had to be again and again altered, as martyrdom, asceticism, monasticism, the Franciscan beggar monks, Tolstoy's pacifism, Ghandi's cottage industries, Martin Luther King's non-violent resistance, Liberation Theology.

Indeed the option of a literal interpretation is not viable. To turn the other cheek<sup>86</sup> is not limited to this focal instance, for it is obviously intended to exclude any form of retaliation, such as kicking back when kicked. Thus a literal interpretation, if taken strictly, would not just avoid watering down, it would facilitate

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<sup>85</sup> Q 6:46.

<sup>86</sup> Q 6:29.

dodging. So long as I am not slapped, the saying does not apply to me. One must penetrate through to the point of the saying, and then be radically committed to doing that point, even if at first glance such a hermeneutical detour seems a more slippery procedure.

The Medieval solution was to distinguish two classes of Christians, the fully committed, such as the monks, and then the other class, consisting of the mass of lay Christians. But this is not the original intention of Q, which seems to be oriented almost exclusively to the more rigorous alternative, as its drastic language makes clear.<sup>87</sup> In the Workers' Instructions there may have been an implicit distinction between those who send itinerants out and provide them lodging (the so-called sympathizers),<sup>88</sup> and those sent out and in need of lodging (the workers). Matthew may envisage a class of voluntarily emasculated Christians of whom Origen was the classic instance (those who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom), involving a class distinction between those who cannot receive the saying and those to whom it is given.<sup>89</sup> In any case such a distinction into two classes within the church became obligatory. For example, when an Egyptian monk Hieracas argued that all must conform to monastic rigor, he was ruled to be a heretic.<sup>90</sup> Radicals can do it their way only so long as they let us do it our way. But the intention of Q was clearly the reverse of providing loopholes for the bulk of Christians. The message of Q, like that of Jesus, was addressed to the Jews of the day, who, like the Christian church today, had nothing more than such loopholes already available.

One evasive tactic down through the ages has been the distinction between private conduct and public office, since the government cannot be expected to turn the other cheek and stay in power, which

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<sup>87</sup> Q 9:57-60; 14:26,27; 17:33.

<sup>88</sup> Q 10:2,7. Q 13:26-27 may reflect the chagrin ascribed to the sympathizers who had maintained their identity with emergent normative Judaism rather than undergoing the excommunication to which the Q movement led.

<sup>89</sup> Matt 19:12.

<sup>90</sup> See Epiphanius' *Panarion*, vol. 2, ch. 67, "Against Hieracites," tr. F. Williams, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 1994).

of course they should do, for whatever good "Christian" governments may do. To be sure, Q was not addressed to states, but to individuals, and did not have in view reforming (much less converting) the Roman Empire. Yet the state and its officials are not thereby made exempt. For the kingdom covers the same turf as does the state, in that it applies to what goes beyond private conduct. Hence commitment to the kingdom does involve commitment to systemic change, even to participation in such supra-individual involvement as taking part in community responsibility. The ultimate effect in an evil society is revolution, even though non-violent, irrespective of the extent to which this has or has not been clearly perceived or implemented.

Christianity as such has by and large lost sight of Jesus' cause, and has instead covered over the void with Christology. The Apostles' Creed skipped over what Jesus called for, and in this regard subsequent Christianity has been all too orthodox. The real challenge to Christianity today is to catch sight again of Jesus' ideal and to implement it effectively in our world.

In his utopian ideal (which he called the reign of God) Jesus assumed that God casts out demons and heals diseases, and would banish all forms of evil, individual and systemic. Hence his radical trust in God did not lead to passivity, but triggered activity, such as exorcisms and healings. With our demythologized view of the reign of God and of the demonized world, our question should be what we in our situation can do to implement such utopia.

Forces beyond our present control are at work on us, for better or worse: heredity and environment; fate and fortune; politics, culture, society, economics; chronic illnesses, wounds, bodily accidents, diseases, emotional disturbances, drugs; street gangs, the Mafia; prosperity, support groups, the church. In this modern world, this urban jungle, doing the ideal is what is called for. What is needed is a hermeneutic of practise.

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